# **A default to openness**

[Adapted from The Hewlett Foundation’s Statement of Openness and Transparency]

<http://hewlett.org/about-us/values-policies/openness-and-transparency>

We are committed to the principles of openness and transparency. We have long provided timely and detailed data about our grants and operations. Moreover, we continuously look for new ways to share information that can help others understand who we are and what we do.

Sharing information serves several important functions. Communicating what we learn helps others build on our achievements and avoid our mistakes. It can attract new support for effective organizations and strategies while making philanthropy more efficient by reducing the need for duplicative investigation and grants management. Disclosing information about our strategies, grants, and results can help foster debate about philanthropy, both generally and in particular areas. It also encourages collaboration by making potential partners visible.

In addition, being open and transparent enhances our own work. It invites others to tell us why our approach may or may not work or how it could be better. It enables intended beneficiaries to share reactions and give feedback, and it invites experts in the relevant fields to offer criticism and advice. Broadly sharing information about our strategies and practices also encourages input from the wider public, whose welfare is our ultimate objective. That foundations are not formally required to disclose information does not, in our view, relieve us of the responsibility to open ourselves to challenge and critique—even (or perhaps especially) if that means having our ideas and actions questioned. On the contrary, we welcome such challenges as an opportunity to learn, to engage, and to improve.

To put this commitment to openness and transparency into action, we begin with a presumption that information created by or about the Foundation should be freely available. We then ask whether there are reasons to make exceptions, mindful that exceptions in individual cases must be properly justified and no broader than necessary. We will, for example, recognize principled exclusions from our general policy of transparency where disclosure would violate the right of privacy or a legal norm or threaten physical or material harm to an individual or organization. Our basic commitment, however, is to share information.

In embracing the value of openness, we do no more than hold ourselves to standards of behavior we have urged on others.

This policy of openness formally applies only to us, and we will never disclose confidential information shared with us by grantees or applicants for grants. We do, however, hope that our example will lead the many organizations with whom we work—grantees and foundations alike—to adopt similar policies and openly share information about who they are, how they work, how they are doing, and what they are learning.